

## NEWS RELEASE

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### SCHOOL BMI ASSESSMENT REPORT SHOWS ARKANSAS HOLDING THE LINE ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY

(September 10, 2007) LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – As the nation continues to struggle with childhood obesity rising at an alarming rate, Arkansas has once again documented a statewide halt in the progression of the epidemic after implementing a comprehensive statewide initiative in 2003–2007.

The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) released today Year Four school BMI assessment results showing that Arkansas continues to hold the line on the progression of childhood obesity. Rates for the 2006–2007 school year revealed 20.6% of children were overweight (the heaviest CDC category for children), 0.3% lower than the first year assessments in 2003–2004 but slightly higher than the 2005–2006 assessments.

Continued good news overall, according to Joe Thompson, MD, MPH, ACHI director and state surgeon general. Thompson, however, cautions that while Arkansas is holding the line, more efforts are needed if we hope to eventually reverse the epidemic.

“Childhood obesity is a serious health issue that has developed over the past three decades or more and there’s not a quick fix. Arkansas communities, families, schools, clinicians, policy-makers and the media have focused attention on the problem and, as a result, actions have been taken enabling us to hold the line on the progression of childhood obesity in our state.” Thompson said. “But, with nearly 38 percent of our young people either overweight or at risk, we must keep all hands on deck and bring on more resources to reverse the epidemic and improve our children’s future health prospects.”

To provide perspective on the national scope of the childhood obesity issue, Thompson mentioned that the nation’s largest health philanthropy, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, recently announced a \$500 million commitment over the next five years to tackle childhood obesity.

(MORE)

*ACHI is a nonpartisan, independent, health policy center that serves as a catalyst to improve the health of Arkansans.*



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The Foundation's goal is to reverse the epidemic in the United States by the year 2015.

"The childhood obesity epidemic has been more severe in Arkansas and the southern states than in the rest of the country, so we have a little farther to go when it comes to turning it around," Thompson said. "On the positive side, we recognized the problem early and took aggressive action which gives us a little bit of a head start, so I think the goal of reversing childhood obesity by 2015 is an achievable goal for Arkansas too."

The uniquely comprehensive program that gave Arkansas its head start against childhood obesity was highlighted recently when the nation's first organized regional response to the obesity epidemic – the Southern Obesity Conference – was held in Little Rock August 26–28, 2007. Arkansans attending the conference had an opportunity to provide guidance through lessons learned over the past four years to representatives from throughout the south who gathered to plan their own state initiatives.

The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) is a nonpartisan, independent health policy center dedicated to improving the health of Arkansans. It is jointly supported by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, the Arkansas Department of Human Services and Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

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